The Portfolio Connection

Newsletter

July/August, 1993 Vol 2 Issue No. 3

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Is the Tide Turning?

What future for the Portfolio?

The Portfolio is now four years old which, in computer terms, means it is definitely getting old. There have been signs that it is losing its place in the market - many firms are selling off their Portfolio stock - and the news about the BSE interfaces and Swift ST Link (see page 2) is disappointing. However, the Portfolio has not yet been discontinued and we still get a constant stream of new enquiries from people who have bought or are considering the purchase of a Portfolio.

The Portfolio has been misunderstood by the computer press since its beginning but as new and 'better' palmtops have come (and gone!), the trusty 'Port' still seems to have a definite niche. Why is this? Well, it is truly portable but with a keyboard that you can still type on at a reasonable speed. It is largely DOS compatible but also has a host of specialist software available (as in our libraries). With update.com loaded it seems to be very reliable compared to some palmtops and has excellent battery life averaging three weeks for general use. Finally, although the viewing screen is restricted to 8 x 40, the size of the screen font makes it much easier to read than the majority of palmtops. It is also one of the cheapest portable computing solutions. You may want to add more reasons of your own.

We are certain that the Portfolio will slowly be eclipsed by new and better technology but, as long as you, the customers, continue to need and make use of it, we will continue to support this excellent machine to the very best of our ability.

Postage Increases - <u>mostly</u> good news...

As you may be aware, the Post Office has recently increased the price of registered and recorded delivery packages (which we use to dispatch more valuable goods). In addition, there has recently been an increase in the carriage charges of some of our suppliers. However, we are pleased to report that, with one exception, we have managed to absorb the cost of these increases for the time being. The exception is our card copying service, where a significant portion of the cost is for the return of the customers card by registered post. Therefore, as of 1st September, 1993 the card copying service will be increased from the current £7.50 to £8.50 per card including VAT & P+P.

Help wanted - Do you use a Canon BJ10 or other portable printer?

In a future issue, we are hoping to run an article comparing the use of various portable printers with the Portfolio. We have information on the Kodak Diconix 150 and IBM 5183, but would welcome information on the use of the Canon BJ10 and other portables with the Portfolio. Send us a short article or notes on your experiences - a free *Portfolio Connection* software set will be given for any information used. Send your notes by letter or on disk - thanks!

PGPrint - Graphics Printing Program

Finally, if you've been waiting to print graphics on the Port then check out this great new program on page 7!

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New This Issue:

This issue sees three new sets:

New Sets

GM4 - Games 4

- **Callisto** - a space mining game
- **Cave** - a small text adventure
- **PFPeaks** - Portfolio Peaks is an addictive patients-type card game
- **Quarto** - two-way tetris. standard tetris or, for a real challenge, play in both directions at the same time!
- **Twist2** - the game of 21
- **ESP** - an ESP testing program. Written for DOS but works on the Port
- **Punkman** - Impressive PacMan type game for the Portfolio
- **Wator** - Fish and Sharks engage in a battle for survival. This text program is similar to the game of life

GR5 - Graphics 5

- **Demo1** - a Portfolio graphic demo with scrolling messages
- **Pix** - a random pattern program, rather like a screen saver
- **Port Art** - another random pattern generator
- **Andrea** - an 80k scanned pgx animation of a young toddler
- **Pgx** - a pgx animation player. Faster than PGFlix

/Continued on Page 7

Top Ten Sets

❶	⇔	**Games 1**
❷	⇧	**Wordprocessing 1**
❸	⇧	**Utilities 1**
❹	⇧	**ST Accessories 2**
❺	⇧	**Games 3**
❻	⇧	**PBasic 2**
❼	⇧	**Graphics 3**
❽	⇩	**PBasic 1**
❾	⇧	**PC Accessories 2**
❿	⇧	**Portfolio Demo**

NEWS

Compax Cards A Success

The new Compax 128k Advanced Memory Cards announced in the last issue of the newsletter have proved to be very popular with Portfolio users and are continuing to sell well. We are not at all surprised given the superior performance of the cards coupled with the attractive price tag of just **£79.95** including VAT & P+P!

We have had a number of enquiries regarding the nature of the new memory cards particularly with regard to the internal battery so we shall answer them here for the benefit of all.

Firstly these cards are *not* Flash Ram cards like the Optrol card and subsequently *do not* gradually get filled up and have to be 'cleaned' like the Optrol card. They are essentially the same as the standard 128k memory cards but the internal battery is rechargeable and does not have to be replaced like the standard card.

Regarding the battery, we had a couple of enquiries about the life of the internal battery. We contacted Compax in Australia who told us the following:

> "With regard to the battery life within the Ramcard, data retention once the card is removed from the Portfolio is approximately ONE year. We advise our customers if they do not intend to use the Ramcard on a regular basis, they should do a back-up on floppy or hard disk. If they do not have access to another computer, then they should try to use their Ramcard once a month.
>
> With regard to the testing of battery life, we have not done independent testing over extensive time periods. The manufacturer of these lithium batteries is a leading Japanese firm and they warrant that their Lithium Batteries provide 'Reliability and durability for more than 10 years'.
>
> We have been producing and selling these Ramcards for about 18 months now and have not had any client get back to us with a problem. So we infer from this that customers are using them properly and have been satisfied with the product. Feedback from the customer survey we undertook earlier this year was very positive. Assure your customers that our company policy is to replace any product if it is found to be defective within the one year Warranty period."

We hope this clarifies the picture regarding the new cards. If you have any further queries or wish to order then contact us here at *The Portfolio Connection* on (0491) 836880.

BSE Interface Price Rise Shock

BSE have reluctantly announced a big price increase in their Universal I/O interfaces due to difficulties in obtaining certain components and the world-wide increase in RAM prices. Due to the latter they are holding production of the 512k units and have scaled down production of the standard 0k unit. This means that we must increase the price of the 0k unit to £129.95 including VAT & P+P and it may now take some time to obtain the units. The 512k units will not be available for the present although we do have a *very* limited quantity of 512k upgrades for the standard 0k unit. Price for the remaining upgrades is a bargain at just £99.95 including VAT & P+P and will be on a strictly 'first come, first served' basis.

We are very disappointed by this news as the BSE Universal I/O Interface is an excellent piece of equipment and represents a truly versatile peripheral for the Portfolio, but we feel the price rise will deter many Portfolio users who were considering purchase of the unit. As usual, we will keep you informed of developments and if you want to snap up one of the remaining 512k upgrades then contact us on (0491) 836880 - but quickly!.

Re:Port Returns

Re:Port newsletter is back after skipping an issue. The delay was due to the editor David E. Stewart, moving to take up a new position in Atlanta, Georgia. However, he will be continuing as Re:Port's editor and has assured subscribers that the loss of the May issue will not affect their subscription - they will still receive a full six issues.

The current issue of Re:Port contains a review of PBase, the database from Autobyte, along with regular features such as the Advanced Programming Column. This issue's programs include SuperPrint, an editor hook to embed printer codes, and a Peg game. An added bonus if you solve the game is a secret code which could win you a serial interface.

You can buy a year's subscription of Re:Port (6 bimonthly issues) directly from America for $55 but to save the hassle involved, we have arranged with David to distribute Re:Port here in Britain. One year's subscription costs just £40 including P+P - contact *The Portfolio Connection* for details. Please note that prices may be subject to change without notice due to fluctuations in the exchange rate.

Parallel ST Transfer

As if it wasn't already difficult enough, Atari ST users attempting to connect their Portfolio to their ST using the parallel port, now have a couple of additional obstacles.

Our supplier of ST Link recently informed us that Swift, who make the commercial program ST Link, are no longer in business and that consequently ST Link itself is no longer available. We are currently trying to track any remaining sources and are also following up another parallel ST Transfer program called FolioTalk to see if it is still available.

As reported in the last issue of *The Portfolio Connection* Newsletter, the shareware ST-Folio program in set ST3 allows limited parallel transfer of files between Portfolio and ST, but the user must make up a special transfer cable to the instructions included in the set. Since then we have heard that the central component , a 74HC125 integrated circuit, is no longer available. One of our readers is currently attempting to make up a cable using an equivalent chip and will be letting us know how he gets on.

As soon as we have any information on this, Swift ST Link or FolioTalk we will, of course, be passing it onto you via the pages of the newsletter. In the meantime, the easiest ST-Portfolio transfer solution requires the serial interface and either our ST-Transfer Pack at £15 or the commercial Slave Plus at £44.90(both include VAT/ P+P).

more next issue....

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A Review of The Compax Utilities Card

A look at some useful programs

Compax, the Australian company who make the successful 128k advanced memory card, also sell a range of software on Portfolio ROM Cards. In this issue we take a look at their 'Compax Utilities' card.

For those of you who are not clear about it, a ROM card is a card similar to a standard Portfolio memory card which contains commercial software. Although the programs on the card can be run normally, they cannot be altered and you cannot save new files to the card. The programs are 'fixed' on the card and safe from being accidentally deleted.

The Utilities

The Compax Utilities Card contains a variety of useful programs. Here is a list:

- 6010 - a 60 x 10 file viewer
- BMON - a battery monitor
- FM - File Manager Program
- FC - fatal crash recovery
- PDD - Portfolio Disk Doctor
- TSRCLK - a TSR Clock
- UPDT107 - update.com

In addition the card contains text files for the programs and a graphic demo program which generates random patterns similar to Pix and Port Art described in the 'New Programs' section.

The card also comes with a small documentation booklet but, compared to the likes of the HyperList documentation (reviewed last issue), I have to say that the documentation for the Compax Utilities is virtually non-existent and of poor quality. In fairness, if you have some knowledge of DOS-based computers then most of the programs are fairly straightforward but if you are new to the Portfolio then you are likely to be left struggling. Even so, the fatal crash recovery program had no documentation which is not very helpful for such an important program.

Thankfully, the programs themselves are generally of a much better quality. If you take a look at the list above you may find that you are already familiar with some of them - namely update.com and File Manager, which are identical to those supplied by Atari and DIP. See the 'First Aid for Portfolios' article in this issue for an explanation of the benefits of update.com - this is a truly *essential* program for the Portfolio. We'll take a look at the rest below.

TsrClk

This is a simple tsr clock which will display the time in hours and minutes in the top right-hand corner of the screen. The text file on the card warns that it is 'not too compatible with the inbuilt functions'. It appears to have been tacked on to the main utilities as an extra and I guess is of limited use.

BMON - the battery monitor

Now this is a much more useful program which worked faultlessly in tests. The method by which the Portfolio detects when the batteries are low appears to be a secret known only to those who designed the machine and, therefore this program, like other monitor programs is based on an estimate. However, Compax appear to have done their homework and based the monitor on an average use of the Portfolio for two hours a day using alkaline batteries.

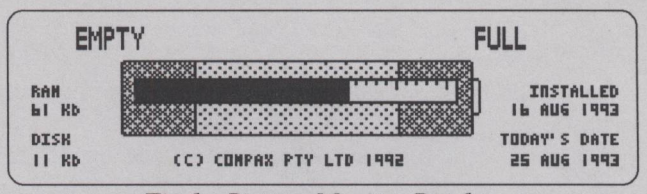

Fig 1 - Battery Monitor Display

When you put in a new set of batteries, the program must be reset by typing:

BMON RESET

followed by enter. After this, the program gauges battery life based on the system date. When you wish to know how your batteries are doing, type in:

BMON

followed by enter. You are presented with a nice graphical display with a 'meter' showing the remaining life of your batteries (see fig. 1). The display also shows the current date, when the batteries were installed, available free RAM and free disk space.

6010 - the 60 x 10 file viewer

This program effectively 'expands' the screen size of the Portfolio by displaying documents in 60 x 10 mode rather than the usual 40 x 8. 60 x 10 is quite a useful size as letters are often about 60 characters wide and a 60 x 10 viewer gives a better idea of how the letter will look on the printed page.

Use of the program is quite straightforward to use. A file is loaded in to the viewer by typing:

6010 filename.ext

where 'filename.ext' is the name of the file you wish to view, followed by enter. Pressing the space bar scrolls the text a page at a time and the Esc key exits from the program. See fig. 2 below for a sample screen display.

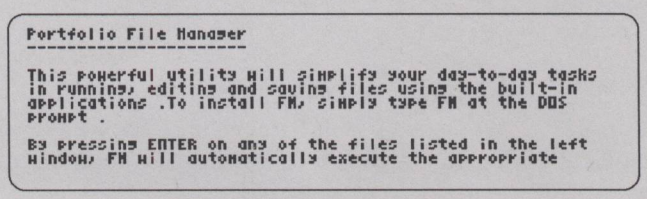
Portfolio File Manager
This powerful utility will simplify your day-to-day tasks in running, editing and saving files using the built-in applications .To install FM, simply type FM at the DOS prompt .
By pressing ENTER on any of the files listed in the left window, FM will automatically execute the appropriate

Fig 2 - 6010 - the file viewer

As you can see, the screen is still quite readable, in spite of the smaller size. One slight disappointment is that the program will not word-wrap files greater than 60 characters wide and longer lines get 'chopped off' at the ends. However, this aside, the file viewer is a very useful accessory for the Port.

/Continued on Page 4

A Review of The Compax Utilities Card - continued

FM - the File Manager

Many of you will either have or be familiar with the File Manager software but we will review it here for the benefit of those who have not come across this excellent program before. Put simply, File Manager provides a user-friendly shell to ease general file management on your Portfolio.

This powerful utility will simplify your day-to-day tasks in running, editing and saving files using the built-in applications. To install FM, simply type

FM

at the DOS prompt, followed by pressing enter. You will be presented with a screen similar to that in fig. 3 below.

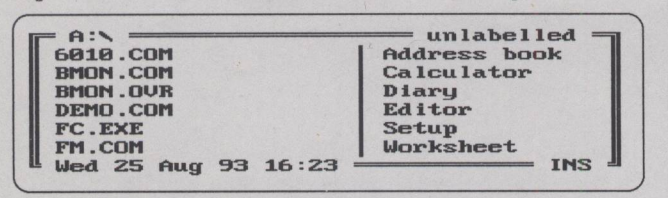

Fig 3 - the File Manager screen

By pressing ENTER on any of the files listed in the left window, FM will automatically execute the appropriate command needed to edit/modify that file. For example, if you position the blinking cursor on unnamed.txt and press enter, FM will open the built-in text editor and load in unnamed.txt in an instant. This is valid for the following file types:

- Text Files .TXT
- Worksheets .WKS
- Address Books .ADR
- Diary Files .DRY

Use the Up/Down arrow keys and PageUp/PageDn keys (Fn+Up/Down) to move up and down the windows. In the "FILE" (left-hand) window, pressing a letter will jump to the first file beginning with that letter. Pressing enter on a directory Eg. SYSTEM will change to that directory.

Pressing F1 or F2 will access menus for the standard DOS commands. Pressing ENTER on a .BAT, .COM, .EXE or .RUN file will execute that file. F3 allows you to execute a command with arguments Eg. PBASIC TEST.BAS. Pressing the Tab key will toggle between the left "FILE" and right "APPLICATION" windows. In the application window pressing enter on the appropriate application will load it.

Pressing Esc and then enter will switch off your Portfolio automatically (you can also return to DOS from this menu).

File Manager also has a number of Shortcut Hot-Keys to simplify tasks. These are:

- Alt C Copy File
- Del or Alt D Delete File
- Alt M Mark and Unmark (single files)
- Alt N New Drive
- Alt R Rename File
- Alt S Show (type) File
- Alt T Tag Files (single files & wildcard groups)
- Alt U Untag Files (single files and wildcard groups)
- Fn O Switch Off

File Manager works flawlessly and is a very useful program to have on your Portfolio. Its only drawback is that it remains in RAM whilst other programs are running and the additional memory it takes up can sometimes cause 'Out of Memory' messages with larger programs such as PBasic and Editor hook programs. Apart from this slight drawback it is another 'must have' especially if you are not familiar with DOS.

FC - fatal crash recovery

This program sounds extremely useful, but its use remains a mystery due to the lack of documentation. On running the program the following message appears:

> "This program will try to recover data from a corrupted/crashed 64K RAMCARD. Please consult your manual before proceeding with the program.
> Proceed with recovering lost data? [N]"

The problem is that the 'manual' contains no mention of FC. Continuing with the program produces a large file on your RAM Card called 'recover.dat', but accessing it appears impossible. We are contacting Compax regarding its use as if it is half as good as the 'Disk Doctor' program (described below), then it is going to be a very useful program indeed. Until then, it remains a puzzle.

PDD - the Portfolio Disk Doctor

This is another excellent utility which stores essential 'image' data from your RAM Card in a small (5k) file called recover.pdd in the SYSTEM directory of drive c:. To use you type in:

PDD UPDATE

followed by enter. If you then accidentally delete or lose a file, simply type in:

PDD RECOVER

and your card will be returned to its original state, recovering your lost files in the process.

In our tests this excellent program worked faultlessly every time and we would rank it as another 'must have'. PDD could be a real life saver when disaster strikes that 'important data you meant to back-up'.

Summary

The Compax Utilities are quite a mixed bag - some of the programs such as the TSR clock are not that special while others such as BMON and PDD are really superb. The package as a whole is let down by the poor or non-existent documentation and the £55.95 price tag (including VAT & P+P) is a little on the steep side.

However if you do not already have the File Manager software and programs such as BMON, PDD and 6010 are going to be useful to you, then the package is well worth considering.

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The PBasic Column

Working with the Spreadsheet - part two

Back in Vol. 2, Issue 1 of the Newsletter, we took a look at the three functions used by PBasic to access the Portfolio's built-in spreadsheet. These were:

- WKSREAD - returns the numerical value of a given spreadsheet cell
- WKSREAD$ - returns the string value of a given spreadsheet cell
- WKSTYPE - returns the type of a given spreadsheet cell

In this issue we have a program listing, LINEPLOT.BAS, which will create and draw a line graph from a single row or column of values from a worksheet file. The graph is then saved as a PGC file with the same name as the spreadsheet used. In its present form the program will accept values within the range of Columns A to Z and Rows 1 to 60.

Lineplot.bas

```
dim a(60)                                                    '1
savescr=screen                                               '2
cls                                                          '3

input"Enter name of Worksheet";wk$                           '4
print"Range can only be one-dimensional:"                     '5
print"i.e. only one row or one column"                        '6
input"Enter starting column";scol$                           '7
input"Enter ending column";ecol$                             '8
input"Enter starting row";srow                               '9
input"Enter ending row";erow                                 '10
print"Please wait....Computing";                             '11

scol$=ucase$(scol$)                                          '12
ecol$=ucase$(ecol$)                                          '13
scol=asc(scol$)-65                                           '14
ecol=asc(ecol$)-65                                           '15
srow=srow-1                                                  '16
erow=erow-1                                                  '17

if scol=ecol then                                            '18
    column=true                                              '19
    base=scol                                                '20
    range=erow-srow                                          '21
else                                                         '22
    column=false                                             '23
    base=srow                                                '24
    range=ecol-scol                                          '25
endif                                                        '26

for n=0 to range if column then                              '27
    a(n)=wksread(wk$,srow+n,base)                            '28
else                                                         '29
    a(n)=wksread(wk$,base,scol+n)                            '30
endif                                                        '31
if n=0 then max=a(n)                                         '32
if a(n)>max then max=a(n)                                    '33
next n                                                       '34

screen 6                                                     '35
xspace=240/(n+1)                                             '36
yspace=64/max                                                '37
for n=1 to range                                             '38
    line((n-1)*xspace,63-a(n-1)*yspace)-(n*xspace,63-a(n)*yspace),1  '39
next n                                                       '40

pgsave wk$                                                   '41
print"Press a key to continue...."                           '42
wait                                                         '43
screen savescr                                               '44
end                                                          '45
```

Notes

The line numbers to the right of the listing do not have to be included and have been added only to make the listing easier to follow.

Lines 1 to 3 of the listing create an array to hold the spreadsheet values, save the current screen mode (so that it can be restored later) and clear the screen ready for program input.

Lines 4 to 11 deal with user input. Line 4 asks the user to input the name of the WKS file to use. The file extension of WKS is assumed and does not need to be entered. Lines 7 and 8 ask for the starting and ending columns (i.e. A to Z) and lines 9 and 10 the starting and ending rows (i.e. 1 to 60) of data to use. Note that there is no error checking so if you enter values outside the program limits, the results will be unpredictable.

Lines 12 to 17 convert the input to the numerical form used by the WKSREAD function.

Lines 18 to 26 work out whether the data to be read from the WKS file is a column or row (remember that in this program, it can only be one or the other).

Lines 27 to 34 read the specified data from the WKS file into the array a(n). At the same time, the highest value is stored in the variable 'max' (this is used later for scaling the Y axis of the graph).

Lines 35 to 40 draw the graph. Line 35 sets the screen to graphics mode. Lines 36 and 37 work out the spacing of the points on the X and Y axes depending on the number and size of the values used. Lines 38 to 40 plot the actual graph using PBasic's LINE command. Line 39 does most of the work, drawing a line from the previous plot point to the current one. This bit of code is quite complex and is made more so by the extra code to space the points equally on the graph. However, if you check out the LINE command in the PBasic manual and break down line 39 carefully, it should make sense.

Lines 41 to 45 round off the program. Line 41 saves the graph as a PGC file with the same name as the worksheet used. Lines 42 and 43 wait for a key press and line 44 restores the original screen mode.

This is a fairly simple program which could be built on to include axis lines and labels, titles, line, bargraph or even pie graph options etc. etc. As a starter checkout WKSPLOT.BAS in SET PB1 which is a slightly more sophisticated program offering a bargraph option as well as line. The PBasic worksheet functions give your Portfolio real potential, especially as you can now use The Portfolio Connection's PGPrint program to print out the graphs (see page 7).

Send us your PBasic Program Listings

In the next PBasic column we will be looking at some program listings sent in by readers. If you have a program you would like to share with other Portfolio users then send us the listing and, if possible, a working copy on 5" or 3" disk. For each contribution used we will give the author a free set from our libraries.

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PBasic (currently version 5.0) is a public domain BASIC interpreter for the Portfolio, written by B J Gleason of The American University.

First Aid for Portfolios

Portfolio Hints and Tips ✔

- What to do when your Port seizes

We get a number of desperate phone calls from folk whose Portfolios have seized up on them. Here we'll have a look at what you can do about it, to keep any data loss - and frustration - to a minimum.

Why does the Port seize?

Well, firstly computers seem to have an irritating habit of doing this from time to time when they cannot deal effectively with the data or instructions they are receiving. In the case of the Portfolio there is an additional problem in that there are a number of bugs in the special customised chip the Portfolio uses.

Update.com

These bugs are eliminated by loading the 'update.com tsr program. Update.com was written by DIP to trap the bugs and should be available from both DIP Systems Ltd and Atari. It is well worth obtaining this program and all Portfolio users should have a copy. The program is also available from *the Portfolio Connection* in Set UT1 although we now try to include it on all sets we sell. Also, if you send us a floppy disk and 2x24p stamps to cover post and packing, we'll send you a copy. Update.com can be placed in your autoexec.bat file or type:

update

at the DOS prompt, followed by enter. A message will appear saying 'Update+Ok'. This will then remain in memory and trap the internal bugs until the Port is next rebooted. If you are getting a lot of seizures and 'system errors', then you will find that after loading update.com they will hardly ever occur, if at all.

When the dreaded occurs...

1 First and foremost, 'Don't Panic'. It is often possible to save your precious data if you stop and take it slow. Rash attempts to correct the situation can often lose data which could have otherwise been saved and, believe me, I'm talking from personal experience here!

2 The first thing to try is pressing the Esc key as this will 'back out' of most situations and is almost exclusively given this role in the majority of software programs.

3 If a message has appeared, then try to follow the instructions. Save your data and, to be on the safe side, perform a 'warm reboot' (see below).

4 Try to break out of the program by holding down the blue Fn key and pressing B. This is the same as the Ctrl-C or Ctrl-Break sequence on a conventional PC.

5 If this does not work, try a 'warm reboot' by holding down the Ctrl and Alt keys and pressing the Del key. Anything currently in memory will be lost, but your C: drive will still be intact. If nothing happens, try it a few more times before progressing to the 'hardware reset' below.

6 If the above is unsuccessful, try a 'hardware reset'. To do this, turn the Portfolio over and depress the metal switch in the hole marked 'Reset' using a small sharp implement such as a drawing pin or paper clip. This is similar to the Ctrl-Alt-Del sequence described above but has the added advantage of working when the keyboard has stopped responding to input. The disadvantage is that, although the C: drive *should* survive intact, it does not always do so. Like the warm reboot above, try it a few times if it does not work at first.

7 If a 'hardware reset' does not work, then you will need to try a 'system reset'. This is more drastic as you will definitely lose any data or programs on the C: drive but, if the above has not worked, then you don't have a great deal of choice! Any data on memory cards should be quite safe though. Disconnect the AC adaptor if it is attached and remove the first battery from the battery compartment. With the battery compartment facing toward you, there is a small slot to the left of the compartment containing a metal strip. Using a paper clip or similar object, depress the metal strip and hold it in for about ten seconds. The Portfolio has a capacitor which retains power whilst you change batteries. Holding the metal strip should discharge the capacitor and, after reinserting the battery, the Port returns to its initial start-up screen where you are asked to enter the language you wish to use etc.

8 Believe it or not, sometimes even the 'system reset' does not seem to be enough. If this is the case then disconnect the AC adaptor if attached, remove the batteries and leave the Portfolio overnight or for about eight hours. In 99.9% of cases this will do the trick, but again you will lose everything on the C: drive. If this does not work, then you have a duff Port, which is in need of replacement or repair!

Batteries

Another cause of seizures is failing batteries. If you suspect this to be the case, then connect your Portfolio to an AC adaptor, until you can change the batteries. In our opinion the AC adaptor is another essential for the Portfolio user and should be used whenever possible. If the batteries are low then connecting the AC adaptor (which supplies full power) can make the difference between saving or losing your data. The adaptor can also help if your memory card battery is low as it will power the card for you. It is also worth noting that, if your memory card battery is low, it will cause additional drain on the internal batteries. If you do not have an AC adaptor then switch off your Port as soon as you get a low battery warning and change the batteries as soon as possible. This is particularly important with rechargeable batteries which do not give much warning when power is low. Remember to change any memory card batteries in good time as well.

Backing Up your Data

Back-up your data on a regular basis - unfortunately, most of us seem to learn this the hard way. It is well worth getting a memory card or some means to transfer files to a desktop computer. Do not rely on the C: drive as it is not a reliable storage area.

We hope you find these tips helpful. Following these rules will not enable you to completely avoid problems but will give you the best possible chance of avoiding a disaster!

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The Portfolio Connection PG Graphics Printer

by Peter Bennett (c)1993

Portfolio Graphics Printing is Here!

Here at the Portfolio Connection, we have had many people contact us, asking for a program to print Portfolio graphic screens.

Literally hundreds of shareware and PD programs have been written for the Portfolio. Very few however, are capable of printing graphics (this includes commercial software), and those that are seem somewhat erratic.

Apart from the novelty value, the ability to print graphics, could be very useful to the businessman on the road e.g. for including simple graphs in letters and reports. So, here it is!

PGPrint - the graphics printer

PGPrint is a program that will dump a Portfolio pgc or pgf graphic to a printer. The pgc and pgf file formats are the accepted standard for Portfolio graphics and most graphical programs available for the Portfolio read and write files in this format. This includes programs such as PBasic, SPaint and PGEdit. Check out this issue's PBasic Column for an example. PGPrint is currently available in two forms:

- A Shareware version (in Set GR5 - Graphics 5) which will print graphics to an Epson compatible printer in a single size. This version is free.
- An Enhanced version which will print graphics to both Epson compatible and Laserjet II compatible printers. The Laserjet setting will also work with the HP Deskjet. The enhanced version will print in a choice of two sizes and is available from *The Portfolio Connection* for just £5 including VAT & P+P

Using PGPrint

To use PGPrint, simply type:

pgprint filename.pg? <Enter>

The '?' should be replaced by a 'c' or 'f' depending on whether your graphic is a .pgc or .pgf file. The default is .pgc so you can just use the first 8 letters of the filename if you wish. Thus, to print 'stonhng1.pgc' you could enter:

pgprint stonhng1.pgc <Enter> or
pgprint stonhng1 <Enter>

but to print sample.pgf, you MUST use:

pgprint sample.pgf <Enter>

After a brief intro screen, the enhanced version displays a menu allowing you to select Epson or Laserjet mode. The graphic is then displayed on the screen for a few seconds. In the enhanced version a further menu appears enabling you select large or small image size and a message is then displayed reminding you to check the printer is connected and on-line. You may exit at this point by pressing the Esc key. Any other key will print your graphic.

Provided you don't switch off your Portfolio once your graphic is printing, you should be treated to a beautiful printed image of your pgc or pgf file. PGPrint has been tested with a Star LC10 printer, a Kodak Diconix portable bubblejet, an HP Laserjet IIP and an HP Deskjet. Perfect results were obtained with all these machines.

In the Pipeline

We are currently working on the next version of PGPrint Enhanced which will trap most printer errors as well as allowing the user to enter an optional title.

The program will not currently work on a conventional PC, although it wouldn't be too difficult to produce a PC version if there is enough interest. Let us know if you feel this would be helpful.

To order your copy of this great new utility just send £5.00 to us here at *The Portfolio Connection*, stating disk size required.

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New this Issue

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1...

- **Wens** - a European Xmas animation: Christmas tree and falling snow
- **Demo** - another graphic Portfolio demo program with three customised information screens
- **PGPrint** - the shareware version of PGPrint (see above). Prints pgf and pgc files on Epson-compatible printers
- **Expgx** - splits pgx animations into component pgf and pgc files. Also view pgx animations on an IBM compatible PC
- **Pgu** - convert pgc to pgf files
- **Showpgc** - view pgc files on the Portfolio
- **Viewpgc** - view pgc files on an IBM compatible PC
- **Viewpgf** - view pgf files on an IBM compatible PC

PG8 - LIAL/ Program Utils

- **Bi2by** - convert bits to byte. Documentation in German but straightforward to use
- **Hex** - gives hex dump of a file to screen or can be redirected to printer/file
- **PBits** - Portbits Base Converter will give the binary, hexadecimal and decimal versions of a number. Entry may be in any of the three bases up to 32 bits and all versions are simultaneously shown on screen
- **Pfgraph** - a C library of Portfolio graphics routines
- **LIAL** - the 'Large Integer Arithmetic Language'. An arithmetic programming language which allows you to solve large integer arithmetic such as high-precision Pi
- **R86** - generate A86 assembler code from com programs. Documentation in German but running the program on its own brings up instructions in English

New Additions

There are no new files added to existing sets this month. However, in the pipeline we still have:

AP6 - Applications 6
PB3 - PBasic 3
UT4 - Utilities 4

More next issue.....

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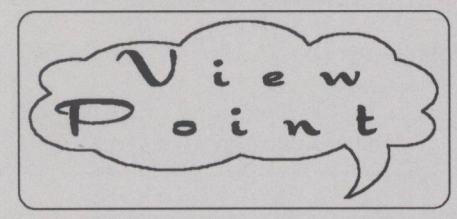


Readers' Letters and Tips

This issue we have letters concerning password programs, rechargeable batteries, a portable floppy disk drive for the Portfolio and an update on the ribbon cable repair article from an earlier issue of the newsletter.

Dear Ed

I have found the password program "secure" (in Set UT1) particularly useful and would like to suggest that users put the command to load it into their Autoexec.Bat file so that even if the computer is warm booted the password programme will not be circumvented. By doing this there seems no way to "Get at" the files without the password.

D.J. Fletcher

.....Thank you for the tip. We feel that 'secure' is probably the best of the password programs available. The method you describe will work with all password programs but is not completely foolproof (a system reset will bypass all security programs, though with the loss of the C: drive), but it does provide a level of security that will keep all but the most determined out. Another useful tip is to create a batch file called, say, O.bat which invokes your password program followed by the Portfolio's 'off' command. Then, when you wish to switch off your Portfolio use o.bat instead of the Portfolio's 'off' command. When you switch on again, you will be required to enter the password before continuing. This can keep your data safe from prying eyes if you leave the Port unattended for a few moments.

Editor

Dear Ed

I use rechargeable batteries for my Portfolio and this initially caused some problems. I now save my data regularly onto A: as the low battery warning does not usually work in time. I can often guess when the charge is low as the cursor and screen movement slows. Having copied regularly onto A: (including contents of C:\SYSTEM) I now manage very well and don't lose any important work anymore. I have a number of simple .BAT files to help keep up to date. Does anyone else have other tips in this respect?

John Deutsch

.....As you say, it is quite possible to use rechargeable batteries in the Portfolio. The problem is that the power 'drop off' is quite sudden as the batteries come close to being fully discharged. Because of this, it is usually dangerously low by the time the 'Low Battery' warning appears. However, it is possible to live with this as long as you back-up your data on a regular basis. Some users have two sets of rechargeables which they rotate every few days. Regarding programs to assist in back-ups, there are a number in the utilities sets in the library.

Editor

Dear Ed

The handydisk has proved an economical method of extending the Portfolio data storage, without sacrificing its portability. There are two slight disadvantages:-

1) The handydisk cannot accept the MD command from DOS. I simply use a separate disk for each directory, but maybe another reader may come up with a program to overcome this slight disadvantage.

2) The transfer of data between Port and disk is slower than drive to drive on the Port.

There may be some readers who are without mains power, particularly marine users who would find the handydisk useful as it operates from internal batteries (I have not tried this) or 12volts D.C.

Roger Bidwell

.....for those of you unfamiliar with the Handydisk it is a portable 3½" floppy disk drive, made by the British company Cristie Electronics, which will work with the Portfolio via the serial interface. It is quite expensive at £199.95 excluding VAT & P+P for the basic unit, but is very sturdily made and will accept both high density and double density floppy disks. Regarding the MD command, there is a similar problem with the BSE FlashDrive hard disk and this is due to the special version of DOS used by the Portfolio rather than the HandyDisk or FlashDrive themselves. BSE have got round the problem by writing a special program to create directories on the Flashdrive so we guess that a similar solution should be possible for the Handydisk - it may even be that the BSE program would work with the Handydisk. As you say, transfer using the Handydisk is slower than both drive to drive on the Port and the conventional floppy disk drive but it still compares favourably with, say, the parallel file transfer software supplied with the parallel interface.

Editor

Dear Ed

With reference to the information I supplied earlier this year about a way of making a replacement Flexi-board, I forgot to mention that the lead must be long enough not to be strained when the unit is reassembled (as I found out to my cost). I hope that this will help others not to make the same mistake!

Kevin Swaine

.....Thanks for the update Kevin - we hope your Port is up and running once more! We also received a slightly drastic solution to the problem of strain on the ribbon cable from Ken Shier. He suggests carefully breaking off the plastic tube in the centre of the hinge. Although its purpose is presumably to protect the cable, it can snag it and thus shorten its life. Breaking off the tube leaves the cable free to move. Don't forget that if you do have problems with the ribbon cable (or other fault) but do not feel adventurous or skilful enough for the DIY approach, then we can put you in touch with someone who does excellent professional Portfolio repairs at very reasonable prices.

Editor

Send your letters/tips to:

The Portfolio Connection
Bucklands Cottage
Wallingford Road
Cholsey
Oxon OX10 9HB

Beginners Column

How to get the British date format

We get a number of those of queries from those of you new to the Portfolio, who are understandably perplexed as to how to change the date display on the Portfolio from the American MM-DD-YY format to the British DD-MM-YY. Well the reason you are perplexed is that the way to achieve this is devious to say the least! Let's unravel the mystery now.

The Config.sys File

Like most computers, the standard Portfolio uses the American date format by default and needs to be configured to the British format. This is achieved, not by the SetUp menu as you might expect, but via a special file called CONFIG.SYS. This is short for 'configure system', because the file contains information your Portfolio needs to configure itself to your requirements.

Whenever the Portfolio is 'rebooted' (reboot is computer terminology for reset), it looks for two special files, one of which is the config.sys file and the other the autoexec.bat file (more of this later). If they are present then the Portfolio uses the information in the files to configure itself rather than its own default settings.

'OK,' I hear you say, 'so where are these files?'. Well this is another cause of confusion to the beginner because even though the Portfolio looks for them when it is reset, they are not present as a matter of course - if you need them you have to create them yourself.

Setting the Date Format

Back to the problem of the system date format. As we said earlier, the Portfolio will default to the American date format - UNLESS you have a 'country=' statement in your config.sys file.

As the name suggests, the 'country=' statement will instruct the Portfolio to configure itself to the specified country. Unfortunately, each country is specified by a number rather than letters although these numbers are standard in all IBM compatible computers.

These numbers can be found in your manual but we have reproduced them below:

- Australia 061
- Belgium 032
- Denmark 045
- Finland 358
- France 033
- Germany 049
- Italy 039
- Netherlands 031
- Norway 047
- Spain 034
- Sweden 046
- Switzerland 041
- UK 044
- US 001

You may have noticed that these numbers are very similar to the international dialling codes but, I digress.....

Looking at the above list you can see that 044 is the code number for the UK, so to set the British date format, you need a line in your config.sys file which reads:

country=044

Creating the Config.sys File

Here is how to create a config.sys file:

- Enter the Portfolio editor using the APPS menu, File Manager or holding down the red Atari key and pressing E.
- When in the editor, press the Atari key or hold down the blue Fn key and press 1 to bring up the FILE menu.
- Press F for file and N for new and should have a blank page to work on.
- Type in the line:
  country=044
  and press the enter key.
- Bring up the FILE menu again by pressing the Atari key.
- Press F for file and s for save
  In the box type:
  c:\config.sys
  and press enter. This will save the file to your c: drive.

You now have a working config.sys file and you can stop here and use the Esc key to exit from the editor.

If you are feeling adventurous, you may wish to add a couple more lines to your config.sys file before exiting. The first is the 'files=' line and the second the 'buffers=' line. Some programs need more than one file open at once and the 'files=' line enables this to happen. The manual recommends files=20 but files=10 is enough for most uses and will save on memory usage.

The 'buffers=' line sets the disk buffer which can help speed up the system slightly. The recommended value is buffers=32 although as with files you can use a lower value such as buffers=10 and save on memory. If in doubt, the line can be omitted altogether.

However if you do add these lines, your config.sys file should now

look like this:

country=044
files=10
buffers=10

At this point you can save the file and exit from the editor.

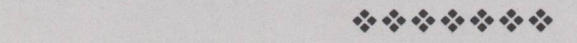
Making the date format operative

If you remember, I said earlier that the Portfolio looks for the config.sys file only when it is rebooted. Thus, to make the Portfolio read your new config.sys file you must now reboot the computer by holding down the Ctrl and Alt keys and pressing the Del key. The UK date format will now be operative.

Due to a design flaw, the config.sys file *must* be on drive c: for the Portfolio to find it although, if you have a memory card, you may also wish to keep a back-up copy on drive a: for safe-keeping. Then, if you lose your c: drive for any reason, you can easily copy the config.sys file back to c: drive.

Well, that's about it for this issue. One last thing to bear in mind is that some programs are internally designed to automatically give the date in US format, regardless of the country setting in your config.sys file. In these cases, there is nothing you can do short of redesigning the program!

Next issue we will be taking a look at the other special file mentioned in this column - the AUTOEXEC.BAT file.



Classifieds

- **For Sale: Atari Portfolio**, 64K Memory Card, Parallel Interface, Mains Adaptor, All disks, diskettes and Instruction Manual + User Guide (Price now reduced from last issue. Contact M.C. Deacon (0483) 416194.

- **For Sale: Atari Portfolio**(v.2.11), Parallel Interface & Software, 64K Card, Leather Wallet, Software. £95. Peter Matthews 0252(Fleet) 614366.

- **For Sale: Portfolio**. Contact Kim Stewart 0604 768818.

- **Wanted: PCMCIA Adaptors**. We have ahad a couple of requests for the PCMCIA adaptors for the Portfolio which allow PCMCIA cards to be used with the machine. Unfortunately, the adaptor is no longer available so if you have one you wish to get rid of then please contact us here at *The Portfolio Connection* on (0491) 836880. We may be able to 'dispose' of it for you!

Buyers & Sellers Directory

Some classifieds did not reach the newsletter as we are often phoned by people wanting Portfolio peripherals and, where possible, refer them to those of you who are selling equipment. As a result, we are trying a Buyers & Sellers Directory - contact *The Portfolio Connection* and let us know what you are selling. We will enter this into a directory. Those of you who are after specific Portfolio items can contact us and we will put you in touch with the sellers. Any items not sold by the next Newsletter will go in as classifieds. This should make for a quicker turnover all round so we'll try this scheme for a few months and see how it goes.

The Portfolio Connection Newsletter Classifieds are FREE. Send your advert to :

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Oxon OX10 9HB

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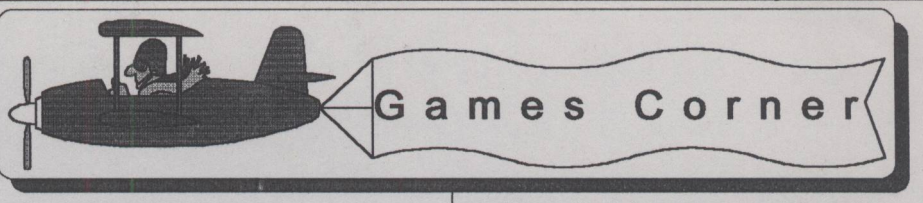

Quarto

Quarto by Paradox Software is a tetris game for the Portfolio with a difference. Unlike the other versions of tetris for the Portfolio, where the machine is turned sideways so the pieces fall from top to bottom, Quarto is easiest to play so that the pieces fall from side to side. More than this however is the ability of Quarto to have two 'walls at the same time, with pieces 'falling' from the middle alternately to left and right.

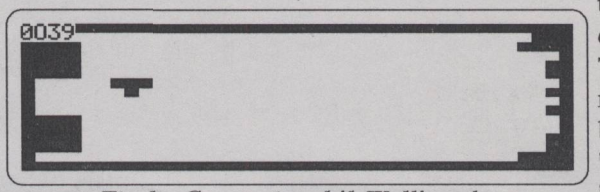

Fig 1 - Conventional '1 Wall' mode

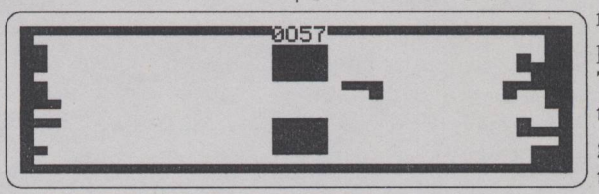

Fig 2 - '2 Wall' mode is much more of a challenge!

After the initial title screen, the user is presented with a simple options screen allowing the choice of three speeds - slow, medium, or fast - and 1 or 2 Wall mode.

In 1 Wall mode the playing screen is quite deep, which is just as well as the pieces move at a brisk pace even in slow mode! This is not a problem at first but becomes more so as the blocks build up.

Four keys are used in play. 'A' moves a piece up the screen and 'Z' moves it down. The '>' key rotates a piece clockwise whilst '<' rotates in the opposite direction. There does not appear to be either 'pause' or 'drop' although with the pieces moving so fast the latter is not really a problem. The keys took a little getting used to. This game is enjoyable in 1 Wall mode and *really* tricky in 2 Wall mode. If you are a tetris nut then this is just the challenge you have been looking for - if not then you'll be better off with Tetrad or Portris. Quarto can be found in set GM4.

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STOP PRESS!

Following up on the ST Link story (see News - page 2), we have now established that ST Link is still available from Austria and that the other program mentioned, FolioTalk, is available from Germany. Look out for an update on both of these programs in the next issue of *The Portfolio Connection* Newsletter.

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Next Issue:

Next issue will be reviewing another program available from the Australian company, Compax. We are also hoping to bring you a comparison of a range of portable printers that can be used with the Portfolio.

Spreadsheet enthusiasts will have no doubt noticed that, due to lack of space, we were unable to include the promised 'Spreadsheet Special' in this issue. We hope to include it in the next issue.

Don't forget to send us *your* news, views and reviews - although you may think it is not important, it may be just the information another reader needs *and* each item published will receive free, with our compliments, a *Portfolio Connection* PD/Shareware disk of their choice.

Look out as well for the following regular Newsletter items:

- The PBasic Column
- Beginner's Column

The next issue of *The Portfolio Connection* Newsletter is due out mid-October, but for those of you reading the newsletter for the first time, remember:

YOU MUST SUBSCRIBE TO RECEIVE YOUR COPY!

Subscription costs just £7.50 a year - see the enclosed subscription form.

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